



# Family Farm Defenders

P.O. Box 1772, Madison, WI 53701 Fax./Tel. #608-260-0900

March 30, 2003

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Family Farm Defenders – a national family farm advocacy organization with over 1000 members based in Madison, WI – I am contacting your office to express our grave concern over the recently proposed federal standards for meat labeling.

In particular, we are concerned that the USDA's proposed definitions for "grass-fed" "free-range" and "antibiotic-free" could undermine the integrity of these products, jeopardize consumer confidence through misleading labeling, and precipitate negative consequences for the economic livelihood of our members who have devoted much time, energy, and money into developing these sustainable alternatives. It is particularly disturbing to have new federal standards with such glaring shortcomings that we can only interpret as loopholes for further agribusiness abuse – for example, not properly defining "feedlot," "access to pasture," "sub therapeutic," "grass-fed," etc.

We would urge the USDA to start from scratch and make a more concerted and serious effort to develop meat labeling standards in conjunction with consumer advocacy, family farm, environmental, and animal rights organizations – not just through consultations with agribusiness. Furthermore, given the precarious state of consumer trust in the quality and safety of our nation's food supply, it is imperative that the USDA's top priority be defending consumer right to know through truth in labeling. As we have already seen with public anger over behind-the-scenes corruption of the organic rules, people will not put up with any more watered down regulations, particularly if the primary beneficiaries are executives and shareholders – not farmers and consumers.

We look forward to receiving your response on this pressing matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John E. Peck".

John E. Peck  
Executive Director